**William Sydney Porter Biography**

William Sydney Porter, writing as O. Henry, wrote in a dry, humorous style and, as in "The Gift of the Magi," often ironically used coincidences and surprise endings. Released from prison in 1902, Porter went to New York, his home and the setting of most of his fiction for the remainder of his life. Writing prodigiously, he went on to become a revered American writer.

**Profile**

Writer. Born William Sydney Porter, on September 11, 1862, in Greensboro, North Carolina. The American short-story writer, who wrote under the pseudonym O. Henry, pioneered in picturing the lives of lower-class and middle-class New Yorkers.

Porter attended school for a short time, and then clerked in an uncle's drugstore. At the age of 20 William Sydney Porter went to Texas, working first on a ranch and later as a bank teller. In 1887 he married and began to write freelance sketches. A few years later he founded a humorous weekly, the Rolling Stone. When this failed, he became a reporter and columnist on the Houston Post.

Indicted in 1896 for embezzling bank funds (actually a result of technical mismanagement), Porter fled to a reporting job in New Orleans, then to Honduras. When news of his wife's serious illness reached him, he returned to Texas. After her death William Sydney Porter was imprisoned in Columbus, Ohio. During his three-year incarceration, he wrote adventure stories set in Texas and Central America that quickly became popular and were collected in *Cabbages and Kings* (1904).

Released from prison in 1902, Porter went to New York City, his home and the setting of most of his fiction for the remainder of his life. Writing prodigiously under the pen name O. Henry, he completed one story a week for a newspaper, in addition to other stories for magazines. Popular collections of his stories included *The Four Million* (1906); *Heart of the West* and *The Trimmed Lamp* (both 1907); *The Gentle Grafter* and *The Voice of the City* (both 1908); *Options* (1909); and *Whirligigs* and *Strictly Business* (both 1910).

O. Henry's most representative collection was probably *The Four Million*. The title and the stories answered the snobbish claim of socialite Ward McAllister that only 400 people in New York "were really worth noticing" by detailing events in the lives of everyday Manhattanites. In his most famous story, "The Gift of the Magi," a poverty-stricken New York couple secretly sells valued possessions to buy one another Christmas gifts. Ironically, the wife sells her hair so that she can buy her husband a watch chain, while he sells his watch so that he can buy her a pair of combs.

Incapable of integrating a book-length narrative, O. Henry was skilled in plotting short ones. He wrote in a dry, humorous style and, as in "The Gift of the Magi," frequently used coincidences and surprise endings to underline ironies. Even after O. Henry's death on June 5, 1910, stories continued to be collected: *Sixes and Sevens* (1911); *Rolling Stones* (1912); *Waifs and Strays* (1917); *O. Henryana* (1920); *Letters to Lithopolis* (1922); *Postscripts* (1923); and *O. Henry Encore* (1939).

**Bibliography**

"William Sydney Porter." 2013. The Biography Channel website. Sep 23 2013.

<http://www.biography.com/people/william-sydney-porter-9542046>.